

VaRRA News

Publication from the
Vail Ranch Restoration Association

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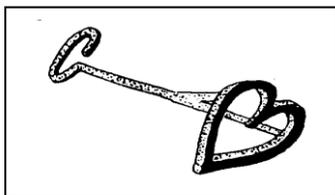
3rd Qtr. 2011 – Volume 2, Issue 3

“Dedicated to the preservation and restoration of the Historic Vail Ranch Headquarters.”

**Little Temecula
History Center is
Open on Sunday –
In Red Implement
Barn next to Kohl’s
At Margarita and
Temecula Pkwy.**

**Sundays 12 – 5 pm
Or by Appointment**

***Come see the results of
our efforts, and perhaps
volunteer to be a docent.***



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A Major Cattle Drive in the West

Desert Trail Diary – Part 3

(Editors Note: Edward, brother of Walter Vail, wrote a series describing a cattle drive that began January 1890 from Vail, Arizona to Temecula, California. The first two parts of this printing were published earlier this year in the VaRRA News. The series was originally published in TEXASLAND – The Pioneer Magazine, years ago, and later in The Arizona Daily Star. The saga continues as they finally get the herd across the river and into California . . .)

By Edward L. Vail

We soon got all our cattle together on the California side and were ready to move. We were all glad to get away from Yuma and take our chances on “The Great Colorado Desert,” as it was then called. We followed the river and met a man, named Carter, who had a small cattle ranch from whom we bought a half a beef that he had just killed. Our cattle were too poor for beef and a whole beef was more than we could haul and as the days were warm we were afraid it would spoil before we could eat it.

Carter was said to know the desert well and I tried to hire him as a guide and offered him \$20 a day to show us where the water was on the desert but he said he had “not been out there for some time. Sometimes there was plenty of water out there and often no water at all as it depended entirely on whether there had been rain.” We decided that Mr. Carter was probably right about the water on the desert and what we saw afterward confirmed that opinion.

We did not travel very far down the river before we were overtaken by two young men with four or five very thin horses. They said they had been following us for some time and were anxious to cross the desert and heard we were driving cattle across to California and asked if we could give them a job. Tom Turner told them we had plenty of help for the cattle with us and they said they were afraid to cross the desert alone as they knew nothing about the country. We told them if they were willing to help us when we required help we would let them go along with us. Tom told them that they could turn their horses in with our horses and he would let them ride some of our mules which came from the Warner Ranch.

We were close to the line of Lower California at that time and soon after we had crossed it we came to a Cocopa Indian Rancheria. The men wore breech cloths and the women wore aprons made out of the bark of willow trees. They were fine specimens of Indians, the men all looking like athletes. I have been told that they came up from Cocopa Mountains in Mexico in order to farm during the summer, raising mostly corn, pumpkins and melons, then in the winter went back to the mountain again. We had not been around their camp long before we got a message from the chief. He sent us word that we were on their land and had no right to pass through there with our cattle and that “all good people” who passed through gave them two steers. We sent word to the chief by one of the Indians who could speak Spanish that we would like to have a conference with him, so the meeting was arranged and we went to the Indian camp. After a parley in Spanish we told him that we were considered “good people” where we came from but that we did not own the cattle we were driving, therefore we would have no right to give them away.

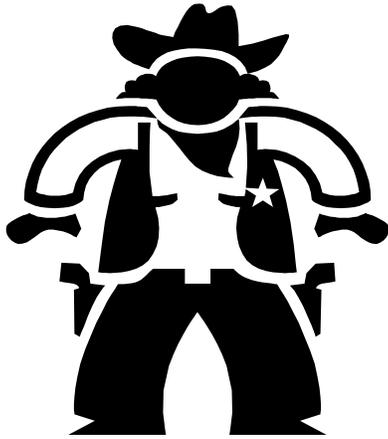
We told them if they would send one of the men to the chuckwagon we would be glad to give them some sugar and coffee. We were very sorry that we did not have more to spare but as we had a long way to go and no stores along the trail we could not give them more than we did.

We followed the old stage road down to where it left the river. I have forgotten the distance but it could not have been over 20 miles. In this place there was quite a lagoon of water, so we camped there. Next day Tom and I followed the old road into the desert looking for water for our next camp. I never saw so many rattlesnakes in my life as we saw that day. They seemed to be of two varieties. One was the ordinary large diamond-back and the other was a little rattlesnake with horns over its eyes called the “side-winder.”

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We rode a long way that day and came back to camp late quite discouraged. Owing to the condition of our cattle which had grown quite thin we were afraid of driving them a long distance. When we reached camp we were surprised to find several tents pitched close to us on the lagoon. We inquired of our men who the people were. They did not know, they thought they were engineers of some kind. Tom and I immediately went over to see and introduced ourselves to the head man who proved to be a civil engineer. His name was D.K. Allen, and he told us he was surveying the line for a railroad from Ensenada, Lower California, to Yuma, and that he had been out on the desert all winter. We then told him our troubles about finding water and he assured us there was plenty of water on the desert and that the first water that we would find was only 17 miles from our present camp. This he said was not sufficient water for all our cattle but that ten miles further on just across the line, near the boundary monument on New River there was quite a large charco in the channel of New River which would probably water all our cattle for a week. (*Ed. Note: "charco" is Spanish for "pool of water".*)

While we were at Mr. Allen's camp his cook was preparing supper and we asked him what he was cooking. He said it was a rattlesnake and he invited us to have some. We passed it along to all our crew who had gone with us to call on Mr. Allen. People were scarce in that country and those men were as much interested in meeting someone as we were. The only man among us who tasted the snake was Jesus Maria Elias, who told us that when he was with General Cook as his chief trailer he had frequently eaten it. I had known Elias and his family well for many years but I had never known that he was as celebrated a man as he really was. Afterward I found out that he had been the leader of the celebrated so-called "Camp Grant Massacre". He, with William Oury, eight Americans, several Mexicans and a lot of Papago Indians marched over to the mouth of Arivipa Canyon, which was right in sight of the old Camp Grant then occupied by American troops, and nearly exterminated the band of Apaches. They killed all but the children whom they brought to Tucson as prisoners. This expedition was sent out because of the constant raids the Apaches made against the settlers on the San Pedro and Santa Cruz rivers. A full account of this interesting expedition can be found in the 2nd volume of Farrish's History of Arizona.

I found Mr. Allen to be a very interesting man. He had traveled extensively throughout Old Mexico and was very much interested in everything that he saw in the wild part of that country. He asked us if we had any beef that we could let him have as he had been eating rattlesnakes for some time because he had not other meat. So we sent him a part of the beef we had bought from Joe Carter. We asked him in regard to the trail across to Carrizo Creek and showed him the maps of San Diego County which then extended to the Colorado River. He marked out all the watering places that he knew about, the last one of which would bring us to within about 40 miles of Carrizo Creek. He also said that he would send one of his own men who knew the country with us if we had any trouble finding the watering places and would send back for the man. He was a very generous man who did not expect any compensation for helping us. Mr. Allen was afterwards editor of a Yuma paper, I think it was The Sentinel.

The next afternoon we bid good-bye to Mr. Allen and the Colorado Valley and drove out 10 miles and camped for the night. Early the following morning we were on our way and in the afternoon we reached the first watering place that Mr. Allen had referred to. We had held the cattle back some distance from this water and Turner and I went ahead and looked at it as we were afraid that the cattle would rush for the water. After looking at the water we decided we would be able to water only the weakest of the cattle. We then cut our herd in two. As the stronger cattle were ahead on the road we drove them on and let the weaker ones have the water. About dark that night we reached the second watering place. This was near the old New River stage station on the old overland road just across the California line, where the town of Calexico now stands. We were quite pleased with the looks of the country thereabouts. The mesquite was beginning to bud out and there was plenty of old grass around. The grass was the kind that is commonly called guayarra.

The green shoots grow out of the old roots and come to a head like timothy. Also there was a great deal of what cattlemen call the "careless weed". All the cattle ate heartily and enjoyed the first good meal they had had for days. We concluded to stay several days and give our cattle a chance to rest.

The next day Turner and I thought we would take a ride over to Indian Wells, the next watering place. We easily found the water and the ruins of the old stage station. This is near what is called Signal Mountain, a very striking peak. It was the only one I saw in the desert as the country all around is very level. The water at Indian Wells was in a round basin with mesquite trees growing all around it. We stretched out under the trees to rest. I soon fell asleep. Some kind of bird cried over my head and made a noise like a rattler. Turner afterward told me it was a cat-bird. I don't know what it was but at the time I nearly jumped into the water. As it was getting late we concluded that we had better be getting back to camp. While we were there Turner's horse was taken sick and seemed to be in considerable pain. So we decided to leave it there and tied it up. I was riding a little horse which, although small,

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Recent VaRRA Donations . . .

Since early April VaRRA has received a number of nice artifact donations. In early April **Dennis Chiniaeff** donated a small antique wooden box filled with cobbler's tools including a shoe last stand, 3 changeable forms, and leather working hand tools.

During May **Jerry Kristensen** donated a single cylinder gas engine painted red. This little motor would be the type to power pumps and other equipment that could be powered with a leather drive belt. Later in the month **Glen & Rosemary Ashcraft** gave VaRRA a very nice restored 1901 Doctor's Buggy, with fold down top and newly refurbished red wheels.

Otto & Nancy Baron donated a long list of items which include books, magazines, antique wall clock, an old "Handy Button Machine", antique light bulb, sausage meat grinder, corn sheller, poster of Model T lubrication points, and a signed Ralph Love print of his well known Temecula in the Autumn painting.

And **Dr. Anne Miller & Dr. David Elliott** donated a number of nice books that will be added to our library.

About the Empire Ranch

The cattle drive told about in this newsletter started at the Empire Ranch, which is about 30 miles southeast of Tucson, Arizona.

Several VaRRA members took a trip to the ranch last October during an annual Roundup Fiesta, and had a chance to meet members of the Vail Family.

Many activities were planned during the day, including cattle roping, horsemanship, and lariat making to mention a few -- all of which added to the enjoyment of the ambience of the old ranch. Live music was a big part of the day, as was a nice BBQ lunch.

The ranch is presently owned by the Federal Bureau of Land Management. A foundation similar to VaRRA keeps the legacy alive at the Arizona ranch. Their story and more can be found at their website www.empireranch.org. The small town of Vail, Arizona is not far away and still has an old building that is said to have been used by Walter Vail when he and brother Edward were shipping cattle out of Arizona by rail.



From the archives of the University of Arizona is this picture (circa 1896-1898) of Edward Vail (left), who led the cattle drive in 1890, George Scholefield a neighbor, & local ranch hand "Bird".

Desert Trail Diary (Continued from Page 2)

proved to have plenty of endurance. We put both of our saddles on my horse, on top of the other. We took turns riding. One would ride ahead, then dismount and walk leaving the horse for the one on foot to catch up and ride. Alternation in this way we had no difficulty in getting to camp.

While camping at New River we found many things of interest. Most of the country was covered with very small snail shells. They were so small that at first I took them to be seeds of some weed. However, they were perfect shells although not larger than the head of a pin. I gathered some of them as curios. In looking around we found signs of cattle herds which had crossed the desert years before. At one place we found where cattle had been bedded for the night and the tracks of the horses and wagons were still distinct. The soil was a sort of heavy clay which must have been wet when the cattle were there. Judging from the size of the bedding ground and from the bones of the cattle that we found scattered around, some of the skeletons were complete, it must have been quite a large herd. We followed the wagon tracks a short distance and found that large mesquite trees had grown up between the wagon tracks. Those tracks must have been made at least 20 years before as the trees were easily that old, judging from their size, as trees have such a slow growth on the desert. Later on we found a human skull which we put in the wagon and carried the rest of the way with us. We also found a wrecked wagon, with the axle broken, which apparently had been abandoned. Afterwards I heard that it probably belonged to some people who had perished on the desert. I believe if the history of that desert could be written it would prove very interesting reading for anyone who cared for real tragedy.

From our camp at New River we dropped to Indian Wells, north of Signal Mountain. Later on the next day we started for Carrizo Creek, which makes the western boundary of the desert. This was the longest drive without water we had to make in crossing the Colorado desert. I think it was about forty miles. Our cattle had done well while camped at New River as there was more pasture for them there than at a place on the trail since we left the Empire Ranch. The country was open so we loose-herded them. Strange to say the only steers we lost on the desert were the two that were drowned in the charco at New River. They were young and very weak and probably got their feet fast in the mud of the middle of the pool. In the morning we found them there, dead, with their heads under the water.

We drove frequently at night as the days were warm on the desert. We hung a lantern on the tailboard of our wagon and our lead steers would follow it like soldiers. Before we reached Yuma only one man was necessary on guard; so we changed every three hours, which gave the men more sleep, but it was rather a lonesome job for the fellow that had to watch the cattle.

The road had a decided grade as it approached the mountains and there was much heavy sand most of the way which made it quite tiresome. I am not quite sure how long we were making that part of the drive, as we had to rest the cattle every few hours. When we reached Carrizo we found a shallow stream of water in a wash, the banks of which were white with alkali. Not only the stream but the hills, barren of all vegetation, were full of the same substance. I never saw a more desolate place in my life. In all of Arizona there is nothing to compare with it that I know of.

The next morning the cattle were scattered up and down the creek, most of them
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Brief Notes. . .

-- Drive by the front of the Old Ranch Headquarters to see a recently completed Eagle Scout Project. Eagle Scout candidate Charlie Strauss, organized and executed the project of constructing a "stage" and some more benches in the story telling area near the front of the ranch (under the large California Sycamore trees). As a final touch, Charlie and his team borrowed the Vail branding iron from VaARRA, and had fun getting it red hot and putting the Vail "heart" brand onto the completed stage & bench project. Check it out.

-- John (Jake) O'Brien a graduating senior from Great Oak HS organized a student initiative volunteer team to work on tree trimming and other clean up work at the Old Vail Ranch Headquarters complex. Jake was in the 3rd grade at Sparkman Elementary in 2002 and participated in VaARRA's first ever special 3rd Grade History studies field trip day, which is still referred to as "Sparkman Days". Jake's memories of that experience have stayed with him, and contributed to his love and respect of history in general, and the historic Vail Ranch Headquarters specifically.

-- Did you see the nice article in the Californian recently about our efforts to capture data from the old Machado Store ledger book? The article featured the on-going efforts of many college history students completing community service hours by helping to keyboard information into a computer. The data will be searchable in a variety of ways to see who was buying what kind of merchandise and the prices they paid. This should be a great historical research asset when completed.

-- On two separate days in late May VaARRA hosted a total of 115 3rd grade students from Pauba Valley Elementary School. The classes walked from their school to the History Center, and each day arrived around 9:45 am. With the students rotating to different locations, we put together educational tours of the old Vail Ranch Headquarters, a nice presentations of ranching history, plus guided tour of all the equipment and displays. Of course the ever popular rope making was also a hit.

Desert Trail Diary (Continued from Page 3)

lying down, but a few of them were eating what little salt grass they could find. They had come through all right from our last camp, except for one young steer that could not get up. We tried to lift him to his feet but he could not stand, so I told the boys that I was going out to see if I could find bunch grass along the hills and the youngest of the Fox brothers offered to go with me. He was a good looking young man nearly six feet tall and about 20 years old, I should think. His brother was rather short and heavily built. These boys had worked cheerfully since they met us and were on good terms with all of our men. Young Fox was a pleasant young fellow and said that Tom Turner had offered to give them work on the Empire Ranch if they would go back there with our men.

A little later, I was surprised to see a carriage with four men in it coming toward our camp from the west. One of the men beckoned to me and I walked over to see what he wanted and who they were. They were the first people we had seen since we left the Colorado River about a hundred miles back. He said he was a sheriff from Arizona, and as he spoke I recognized him. He then asked if we had two Americans with us who had joined us near Yuma and I replied that we had. Then he introduced me to the other three men, one of whom was his deputy, and the other, his driver, who was from Temecula, California, was I think he said a deputy sheriff there. The fourth man, the sheriff told me, came with him from Arizona and was the owner of some horses which he said the Fox boys had stolen from his ranch. The sheriff then told me that he and his deputy had followed the Fox brothers all the way to Yuma and then they had followed our trail after the boys had joined us, until we crossed the line. They then returned to Yuma and took the train for California, as the sheriff could not go into Mexico.

As nearly as I remember I said: "Sheriff, you know the reputation of our outfit; it has never protected a horse thief and has always tried to assist an officer in the discharge of his duty." I also told the sheriff that the boys had done the best they could to help us in crossing the desert and that I was sorry to hear they were in trouble. I felt it was my duty to tell him that the boys were well armed and quick with a gun. "You have plenty of men to take them" I said. "Be careful, I don't want to see anybody hurt." He sheriff answered, "If they ask you anything tell them that we are mining men, going out to look at a mine."

I knew if the boys were sure that the men were officers there would be bloodshed at once. It was a very unpleasant position for me as I really felt a good deal of sympathy for the brothers and I knew them to be young and reckless. The older one came to me and said, "Who are those men and what do they want?"

I had to tell him what the sheriff told me to say, viz., that they said they were mining men going out to look at a mine near there. I could see he was not satisfied and was still anxiously watching the sheriff's party. The newcomers then said they were hungry and I told the man who was cooking to get them something to eat. While they were eating they talked about the mine they were going out to see and I think the boys were less suspicious of them.

Very soon after that while I was standing on one side of the chuck wagon and the elder brother was leaning against the tailboard, with the other brother standing near the front wheel on the opposite side of the wagon from me, I suddenly heard a scuffle and when I looked up I saw the sheriff and another man grab the older boy and take his gun. His deputy and an assistant were holding his brother on the other side of the wagon. They had quite a struggle and young Fox pulled away from them, ran around the wagon past me with the deputy in pursuit. He had run about a hundred yards up a sandy gulch when the deputy who was quite close to the boy suddenly raised his gun and fired. Young Fox dropped and never moved again. I was close behind the deputy, as I had followed him. When he turned toward me his six-shooter was still smoking and he was wiping it with his handkerchief. "I hated to do it," he said, "but you have to sometimes."

I was angry and shocked at his act, as it was the first time I had ever seen a man shot in the back. I then saw the other Fox boy walking towards his brother's body which was still lying on the ground. The officers who had him handcuffed tried to detain him, but he said, "Shoot me if you like, but I am going to my brother." He walked over to where the body lay and looked at it. Then he asked me if we would bury his brother and I told him he could depend on us to do so.

Then I told the sheriff there was no excuse for killing the boy as he could not get away in that kind of a country. He replied that he was very sorry about what had happened, but said, "You know, Vail, that I got my man without killing him, and that it was impossible for me to prevent it, as I had my hands full with the other fellow at the time."

(Editors Note: The final episode of this saga of the Desert Trail Diary written by Edward Vail, will conclude in the next issue of VaARRA News. Look for its release in Q4 2011 where we will be with the Vail cowboys as they bury the young Fox boy and proceed into Southern California to finish the drive at the Warner's Ranch. . .)